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# News Release



SC-G

03-049

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April 22, 2003

## **SERVICE RE-PROPOSES SAN DIEGO FAIRY SHRIMP CRITICAL HABITAT**

Following a legal challenge to its October 23, 2000 designation of critical habitat for the San Diego fairy shrimp (*Branchinecta sandiegonensis*), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today it is re-proposing critical habitat for the endangered species and is preparing a new economic analysis.

The new proposed critical habitat designation covers approximately 6,098 acres of land in Orange and San Diego counties and includes Federal, State, local and private lands. Public comments on the proposed rule will be accepted until June 23, 2003 at 5:00 p.m. A draft economic analysis of the proposed rule will also be made available for public review and comment in the near future.

In light of the current national security situation vernal pools that support San Diego fairy shrimp that occur within active training areas on Marine Corps Base, Camp Pendleton are not being proposed as critical habitat for the species.

We considered but did not propose critical habitat on preserve areas within approved habitat conservation plans. Lands on Marine Corps Air Station, Miramar and the U.S. Navy's Radio Receiving Facility in Coronado, California are not being proposed as critical habitat because these areas are covered by approved Integrated Natural Resource Management Plans and the proposed designation of critical habitat could impair the installations' abilities to conduct military readiness activities.

"We relied on the cumulative scientific and commercial information available to us in preparing this proposal," said Steve Thompson, Manager of the Service's California/Nevada Operations Office. "Our decision to not propose critical habitat on certain lands will not result in the extinction of the San Diego fairy shrimp, however, we are actively soliciting public review and comment on all aspects of the proposed rule."

To ensure adequate public review of our proposal, maps delineating lands essential to the

conservation of the San Diego fairy shrimp that occur on mission-essential training areas on Camp Pendleton are available for viewing on the Internet at <http://carlsbad.fws.gov>. The public may also visit the Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife, by appointment, during normal business hours to view these maps and maps of essential habitat for the San Diego fairy shrimp that lie within preserve areas of approved habitat conservation plans.

Critical habitat identifies geographic areas that are essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and which may require special management considerations. The designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, wilderness, reserve, preserve, or other conservation area. It does not allow government or public access to private lands and does not close areas to all access or use. Rather, its impact is that Federal agencies must consult with the Service on activities they undertake, fund, or permit that may affect critical habitat.

Vernal pools are seasonal wetlands that fill with water during fall and winter rains. They are home to many plants and animals that, in turn, form a valuable part of the food chain for a wide array of animals, including birds of prey, shorebirds, migratory waterfowl, frogs, toads, salamanders and pollinating insects.

The San Diego fairy shrimp is a small aquatic crustacean that is found in shallow vernal pools from January through March, during years with adequate rainfall. Adult fairy shrimp have a delicate elongated body, large stalked compound eyes and 11 pairs of swimming legs. They swim or glide gracefully upside down by using complex wave-like beating movements of the legs that pass from front to back. Adult male San Diego fairy shrimp range in size from 0.35 to 0.63 inches; adult females are 0.31 to 0.55 inches long.

As a result of urban development, agriculture, off-road vehicle activity, livestock overgrazing and other land uses, more than 90 percent of the vernal pool habitat in southern California has been destroyed or otherwise impacted. As the vernal pools have disappeared, populations of San Diego fairy shrimp and other species that rely on this habitat have declined.

The proposed rule to designate critical habitat for the San Diego fairy shrimp was published in today's *Federal Register*. Written comments on the proposed rule should be submitted to the Field Supervisor, Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office, 6010 Hidden Valley Road, Carlsbad, California 92009. Comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m. on June 23, 2003. Requests for a public hearing must be submitted in writing to the above address no later than 5:00 p.m. on May 6, 2003. A separate announcement will be made when the draft economic analysis is released to the public.

Comments may also be submitted by electronic mail to [fw1sdfs@r1.fws.gov](mailto:fw1sdfs@r1.fws.gov). Please submit electronic comments as an ASCII file and avoid the use of special characters or encryption. Please include "Attn: RIN-1018-AI71" in your subject header and your name and return address in the body of your electronic message. If you do not receive a confirmation from the system that we received your message, please contact the Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office at 760/431-9440.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 540 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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